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SUBJECT: CODEL BIDEN MEETS WITH PM GILANI

Classified By: Anne W. Patterson, for reasons 1.4 (b)(d)

¶1. (C) Summary. During a January 9 meeting with Codel Biden, PM Gilani pledged continued Pakistani resolve to fight terrorism and cooperate in the Mumbai investigations. He said that civil-military relations had improved, urged an expedited meeting of the Friends of Pakistan and requested U.S. assistance to build the capabilities of Pakistan's military and police forces. Senators Biden and Graham expressed support for passage of the Biden/Lugar aid legislation in the next Congress. Senator Biden cautioned that increased U.S. assistance depended on the success of the impending U.S. troop surge in Afghanistan. That success in turn depended on Pakistan's cooperation. The U.S. public was war-weary and faced paying for its own economic recovery; for Biden/Lugar to be enacted, he needed to be able to show that Pakistan had a new leadership committed to the fight against terrorism.

¶2. (C) Senator Graham said that he also needed to be able to say that Pakistan would bring the Mumbai perpetrators to justice and that Pakistan had a plan to integrate the Federally Administered Tribal Areas into Pakistan. Interior Minister Malik outlined the increased cooperation between al-Qaida and Tehrik-e-Taliban in planning and executing terrorist operations in Pakistan. He said the military had made progress in Bajaur, Kurram and Khyber agencies with the help of tribal militias, but terrorists like Baitullah Mehsud, the Haqqanis and criminals like Mangal Bagh were still operating. Malik clarified for Senator Biden that the military had made progress in Bajaur because it refused to negotiate with extremists; in Swat, the militants had used a mistakenly-negotiated cease-fire by the provincial government to regroup and take control. End Summary.

¶3. (C) On January 9, Ambassador and Senators Joseph Biden and Lindsey Graham met with PM Yousaf Gilani. Also attending were Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi, Defense Minister Ahmed Mukhtar, Interior Minister Rehman Malik, Foreign Secretary Salman Bashir, Ambassador to the U.S. Hussain Haqqani, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Staff Director Tony Blinken, SFRC Senior Staff Jonah Blank and Puneet Talwar, and Polcouns (notetaker). Prior to this meeting, Gilani had joined the delegation's meeting with President Zardari (septel).

¶4. (C) Gilani asserted that Pakistan had the will to fight terrorism as demonstrated by the consensus joint resolution passed by the National Assembly. "We cannot afford to fail" in this struggle, said Gilani, but Pakistan needs help. The solution is not wholly military, but the Army, Frontier Corps, Frontier Constabulary and the police lack capacity.

Every bomb leads to more capital flight, and the government's political opposition is exploiting current financial problems. He urged that the U.S. expedite the Friends of Pakistan process to address Pakistan's needs.

¶15. (C) Gilani said that Pakistan's civilian-military relationship was improving. Referring to the formation of Lashkar-e-Taiba, Gilani admitted that ISI has historic links to terrorism but said that was changing because Pakistan's national security depended on it. Chief of Army Staff General Kayani supported the democratic civilian government; otherwise, said Gilani, "I would not be here."

¶16. (C) "This is my war," asserted Gilani; the government was working to reduce anti-Americanism based on the perception that Pakistan was fighting America's war. Terrorists killed my leader and only the terrorists benefited from the Mumbai attacks, said Gilani. He noted that ISI DG Pasha had met with CIA Director Hayden to share information on the Mumbai investigation, and Pakistan had agreed to share that information with India. Pakistan was cooperating in the Mumbai investigation and appreciated U.S. assistance in defusing the crisis.

¶17. (C) As additional evidence of Pakistan's resolve, Gilani noted that Pakistan was using its F-16s against militants in the tribal areas, had hosted a mini-jirga with Afghanistan, had participated in tripartite negotiations with Kabul under Turkish auspices, and continued to host over two million Afghan refugees.

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¶18. (C) Senator Biden said it was important to look forward. In the Senate, he had been committed to having the U.S. play a significant role in meeting Pakistan's socio-economic needs, and he hoped the new Congress would enact the Biden/Lugar legislation. The U.S. was helping to organize a donors' conference for Pakistan to help provide long-term economic stability. He had supported efforts to provide military equipment and training to increase Pakistan's counter-insurgency capacity.

¶19. (C) But there was a narrow window for enacting Biden/Lugar, which depended on Pakistan's ability to help the upcoming U.S. troop surge in Afghanistan succeed. It would be important to convince a war-weary American public, which faced paying the cost of its own economic recovery, that the cost in terms of dollars and lives in this region would yield positive results. In the short-term, the U.S. needed to see some immediate measure of improvement.

¶110. (C) Senator Graham said he would continue to support passage of Biden/Lugar, but he expected the introduction of conditional amendments on the Senate floor. He needed to be able to say that Pakistan had a new government committed to a new strategy to fight terrorism and integrate the Federally Administered Tribal Areas into Pakistan. He needed to be able to say that Pakistan was a good ally committed to peace on the other side of the border. And he needed to say that that the new government had a different attitude to law and order and that the perpetrators of the Mumbai attacks would meet justice.

¶111. (C) Gilani responded that he could assure Senator Graham with confidence of all these things. Pakistan was "not scared" to fight; it had the will but lacked the capacity. The U.S. and Pakistan were mutually dependent and would "sink or swim" together. He urged that the U.S. share actionable intelligence so that Pakistan itself could act "so that the finger is pointed at us, not at you." We needed to formulate a joint action strategy.

¶112. (C) FM Qureshi noted that under the new government, Pakistan was better placed to provide results. The people had taken ownership of the terrorism issue, and there was

political consensus to move forward. There was better interaction with Afghanistan, as witnessed by President Zardari's visit to Kabul and the agreements signed there. Civil-military relations were stronger, and the Taliban were no longer considered by the military to be a strategic asset. Both the military and the civilians were willing partners with the U.S.

¶13. (C) Interior Minister Malik described the increasing nexus between al-Qaida and Tehrik-e-Taliban (TTP) by saying that AQ plans attacks and TTP executes them in Pakistan. The military had made progress by ousting extremists from much of Kurram Agency and 98% of Bajaur Agency. Lashkars (tribal militias) demonstrated that the people were joining the Army in fighting back. The situation was better in Khyber Agency, and NATO/ISAF trucks were moving again. But Baitullah Mehsud, the Haqqani network and criminal elements like Mangal Bagh were still operating. Al-Qaida was killing off tribal leaders and lashkars, and Pakistan did not have the funds to give them arms and support to fight back. Malik pledged increased cooperation on the Afghan border and suggested that Pakistan, U.S./NATO forces, and Afghanistan get together to formulate a strategy of shared responsibilities along the border region.

¶14. (C) Senator Biden asked Malik to explain the contradiction between progress in Bajaur and reports that extremists had taken over Swat. Malik explained that Pakistani security forces had refused to negotiate with militants in Bajaur; however, the new Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) government initially agreed (without the support of the federal government) to a cease-fire with Maulana Fazlullah and his supporters in exchange for imposing Sharia law in Swat. The militants took advantage of the lull to regroup, and the police largely fled the area, allowing the extremists to take control over many villages. Now the NWFP government admits its mistake and is ready to fight back, but the situation is much more difficult now that the taliban have consolidated their hold over much of the valley.

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¶15. (C) Senator Biden encouraged the government to regain control of Swat. He noted that some in the Pakistani government and military still clung to the mindset that accommodating terrorists was a good strategy. He hoped the changes promised would increase enthusiasm to combat extremism.

¶16. (C) Codel Biden has cleared this message.
PATTERSON